

Mapping the way to better environmental and health equity in Washington

Historic and Current Health Inequities

Current and historic injustices - based on race, income, and geography - lead to inequitable health outcomes. Washington recognizes that health inequities exist and are systemic, unjust, and avoidable. Communities exposed to multiple sources of pollution are largely low-income and communities of color. These communities also face increased vulnerability to pollution. Increased exposure and vulnerability result in higher cumulative impacts from the pollution.

To remedy these unequal environmental risks, Washington needed a tool to understand and show the impacts of current and historic factors. The tool would also need to show how different factors combine to impact certain communities more severely. The tool would improve environmental and health equity in Washington by guiding resources and public health efforts to areas with the greatest need.

Washington Tracking Network Collaboratively Develops the Environmental Health Disparities Map

We can understand where inequities exist through spatial analysis of Tracking data. This allows users to target resources and programmatic efforts more effectively. The following partners collaborated to create the Environmental Health Disparities (EHD) map:

- Front and Centered
- Puget Sound Clean Air Agency
- University of Washington Department of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences
- Washington Tracking Network (WTN)
- Washington State Department of Ecology

The group developed the EHD map in 2017-8, and publicly launched the map in early 2019.

The map shows the cumulative impact of 19 different health, environmental, and social measures. When combined, these factors show the cumulative risks of environmental burdens each community in Washington state faces. These burdens contribute to inequitable health outcomes.

The map uses data to highlight health and environmental inequities at the census tract level. It ranks each census tract from one to ten based on its overall risk. Users can see relative ranks from the individual measure level to the overall level. The goal of the map is to help governmental agencies and policy makers use cumulative impacts more systematically in their decision-making and resource allocation.

Statewide Usage of the Map Aims to Increase Environmental Justice, Health Equity

The EHD map has helped guide programs and resources at a variety of state agencies since its launch in 2019. These programs use the EHD map with the goal of improving health and the environment in an equitable manner.

Department of Ecology:

Public Participation Grants (PPGs) provide money for individuals and non-profit organizations investigating and cleaning up contaminated sites. They also fund waste management projects. Grant applications for areas with an EHD map rank of eight or higher get priority consideration for an award.

The Product Replacement Program has a program to replace degreasing solvents used in WA auto shops with safer alternatives. WTN assisted Ecology to develop a prioritization/ranking system to direct response and resources using the EHD map.

Department of Commerce:

The Clean Building Incentive Program Planning uses the EHD map to support equitable distribution of \$37.5M in grant funding and confirm eligibility.

The Low-Income Community Solar program uses the EHD mapping tool to prioritize funding and assistance.

The Electrical Grid Modernization program prioritizes communities with overall EHD map ranks of 9s and 10s.

The Electric Vehicle Charging Grid program uses the EHD map to evaluate and prioritize grant applications.

Department of Natural Resource:

The Urban and Community Forestry program uses the EHD map to determine community eligibility for grants to plant more trees.

Department of Health:

The Washington Choose Safe Places program uses the EHD map to determine which Early Care and Education sites are near environmental contamination.

The EHD Map in Legislation

As awareness of the EHD map as a powerful tool has grown, state legislation has begun to reference the EHD map. Here are a few examples:

The *Clean Energy Transformation Act* directs utilities to focus their efforts at reducing pollution and increasing benefits of clean energy to “Highly Impacted Communities.” Highly Impacted Communities are census tracts ranked 9 or 10 on the EHD map.

The *Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act* directs seven agencies to conduct environmental justice assessments for decisions that impact overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. Assessments will assist the agencies with equitable distribution of environmental benefits, reducing environmental harms, and addressing environmental and health disparities. The HEAL Act recommends agencies use the EHD map in their assessments and requires WTN to maintain and expand the map.

The *Climate Commitment Act* will use the EHD map to identify overburdened communities. Under the Act, overburdened communities will receive at least 35% of the investments in clean energy transition and assistance, clean transportation, and climate resiliency projects that promote climate justice.



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DOH 311-010 June 2022